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For the Record

From a Dec. 12, 1984, op-ed article in The Post by Robert M. Gates, nominated this week to head the Central Intelligence Agency:

CIA was created in part to ensure that intelligence assessments would be prepared by people with no stake in approval of weapons programs, defense budgets or particular policies. Perhaps the strongest cultural trait common to all CIA analysts is a very deep sensitivity to the dangers of politicization. Indeed, sometimes we bend perhaps too far toward an adversarial relationship with policy-makers to avoid even the appearance of being suborned. . . .

Perhaps the best guardians of the integrity of the process are the caliber and honesty of the people involved. We are not cowards. We present assessments unwelcome to policy-makers day in, day out on a broad range of issues, and we have for a long time. I believe most policy-makers would attest that, especially on controversial issues, intelligence assessments are more likely to be troublesome than supportive.

Our assessments are not produced in an ivory tower atmosphere. The debates and clash of ideas sometimes are rough. No one's views—from the director to the newest analyst—are protected from challenge. It is not a place for delicate egos or mediocrity or people with special agendas.

But, however hot the debate or pointed the questions during the drafting, the final product is as honest and accurate as humanly possible. Despite imperfections, CIA and the intelligence community produce the best, most comprehensive and most objective intelligence reporting in the world. We are working every day to make it better, and however surprising it may be to our critics, we believe they contribute to this process, and so we listen to them.